

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000840

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/05/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [SOCL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDANIANS REACT TO INTERNATIONAL CARTOON
CONTROVERSY

Classified By: CDA Daniel Rubinstein for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

1. (U) Jordanians angry over the publication of cartoons of the prophet Mohammad demonstrated peacefully in downtown Amman on February 3. Jordanian Islamists have called for a boycott of European products, while the GOJ, facing public pressure, arrested the fired editor of a weekly newspaper for reprinting the controversial cartoons. End Summary.

TWO THOUSAND DEMONSTRATE PEACEFULLY

2. (SBU) Jordanians peacefully took to the streets of downtown Amman on February 3 to protest against the publication of cartoons in European newspapers depicting the prophet Mohammad. The Public Security Directorate (PSD) estimated the crowd at 2,000. The demonstrators - including MPs, political party leaders and imams - chanted anti-Western slogans as they marched in the rain, demanded an apology from countries that published the cartoons, and carried banners condemning Denmark, Norway, France and other European states for their "orchestrated insult to Islam." Imams at several mosques called for boycotts of Danish, French and other European products during Friday prayers immediately before the protest began. Similar, but much smaller, demonstrations reportedly took place on February 3 in other Jordanian cities.

3. (U) Prior to the demonstration, MPs in the Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution January 24 denouncing the Danish and Norwegian newspapers for their "ugly crimes" in publishing the cartoons. The Jordanian Foreign Ministry summoned the Danish honorary consul in Jordan on January 28 to express the GOJ's concern over the caricatures, while Foreign Minister Al-Khatib met with Denmark's nonresident ambassador to Jordan on January 29. According to the Jordan News Agency, Khatib also phoned the Danish Foreign Minister to express "Jordan's rejection of acts insulting to Islam, and calling for measures to put an end to these acts."

4. (U) On January 31, the Islamist-dominated professional associations called for a nationwide boycott of Danish and Norwegian products, as well as events sponsored by the Danish and Norwegian governments. NOTE: Several supermarkets in Amman have pulled Danish products from their shelves. END NOTE. Saleh Armouti, President of the Professional Associations Council (PAC), described the apology of the Danish paper Jyllands-Posten as inadequate - "It was an implied apology, we need a straightforward apology without excuses." NOTE: Armouti is also head of the Jordan Bar Association and an on-again, off-again member of Saddam Hussein's legal defense team. END NOTE. The PAC also held a protest at its headquarters in Amman on February 4 during which several activists urged the audience to stand united against "the blasphemous people." Armouti told the small crowd, "We will not stop our anti-Danish activities until their government apologizes for this criminal act."

5. (U) The Islamic Action Front (IAF), the political wing of the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, has repeatedly spoken out against the cartoons, and sent a public letter to French President Jacques Chirac on February 4 asking him to punish French daily Ce Soir for republishing the images. The IAF warned Paris that "failure to issue a clear official apology for the unjust and harmful moves exposes France's relations with Arab and Islamic countries to danger at a time when calls are rising to boycott your country."

EDITOR SACKED, ARRESTED

6. (U) Responding to the surge in Muslim feeling against the cartoons, King Abdullah, currently in the U.S., condemned publicly on February 2 the "needless desecration and injury of Islamic sensibilities." He denounced cartoons "misrepresenting and vilifying" the prophet Mohammad, pledging that, "We will never allow anyone to abuse Jordan's freedom of expression in order to insult Prophet Mohammad or other prophets or religions." All local media gave prominent

play to his statements.

17. (U) Also on February 2, Jihad Momani, the chief editor of Jordanian weekly Al Shihaan, was sacked for reprinting three of the cartoons in question in the paper's edition for the first week of February. The drawings appeared alongside a commentary by Momani entitled "Muslims of the world, be reasonable," which counseled against over-reaction to the cartoons. The paper's publisher pulled the edition from newsstands and removed the images from its website. The GOJ, through government spokesman Nasser Judeh, demanded that the paper apologize and said the government is considering legal action against it. Several members of parliament promised to take action against Al Shihaan. MP Younes Jamrah (West Banker, Irbid), for example, said the paper "must be closed" for its "direct insult to Islam." The Jordan Press Association, meanwhile, referred Momani to a disciplinary council after "questioning" him at a meeting.

18. (U) Momani quickly apologized publicly on February 2 for reprinting the caricatures. He expressed "deep regret" and averred that he published the cartoons to show readers "the extent of the Danish offense." "I ask God to forgive me and the people to accept my apology," he stated. Despite Momani's apparent remorse, Amman Prosecutor General Sabri Rawashdeh ordered his arrest on February 4 pending further investigation. Momani was charged under Article 273 of the Penal Code, which states "if anyone is proven to have insulted a prophet in public, he will be imprisoned for a period between one year to three years."

19. (U) Momani's arrest was quickly condemned on February 4 by the Jordanian Center for the Defense of Journalists (CDJ). In a statement faxed to the Associated Press, the CDJ said "Journalists in Jordan have worked for many years to abolish such measures because they impose restrictions on the freedom of carrying out their work and they contradict international standards for press freedoms."

110. (U) Al Shihaan was not the first Jordanian publication to publish the Danish cartoons. Al Mehwar - an Arabic weekly with small circulation - had earlier reprinted all 12 of the caricatures, claiming to be "the first Arab newspaper to have alerted the Arab world to these cartoons, discovered on the Internet." Hisham al-Khalidi, editor-in-chief of Al Mehwar, told the Associated Press on February 4 that the reproductions - which were "extremely small" and not easily viewed - were printed with an article criticizing the Danish newspaper that had originally published them. According to the Jordan News Agency, the Prosecutor General has decided to also arrest Khalidi for insulting the prophet Mohammad, though post has not been able to confirm his arrest.

COMMENT

11. (C) The Danish cartoon controversy did not initially attract much public attention in Jordan, which likely made Al Shihaan - widely perceived to be under the control of the General Intelligence Directorate - feel comfortable enough to reproduce the drawings. Indignation over the cartoons grew very quickly, however, as more Arab and international media outlets publicized the issue, particularly on television. The GOJ moved against Momani in an apparent effort to stay ahead of public demands for action. Leading media figures have suggested to us that his arrest may also have been in the interests of his own protection.
Rubinstein